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## THE INTELLIGENCE OF CAPITAL?

MASHINES AUTOMATION, BERNARD STIEGLER, CAPITAL, MACHINES, MARXISM, NEGENTROPY, NON-PHILOSOPHY, TECHNOLOGY

The development of the means of labour into machinery is not an accidental moment of capital, but is rather the historical reshaping of the traditional, inherited means of labour into a form adequate to capital. The accumulation of knowledge and of skill, of the general productive forces of the social brain, is thus absorbed into capital..

—Karl Marx, *Fragment on Machines: Grundrisse*

I remember during the 90's so many works predicting a time vortex, an invasion of the future into our contemporary world. So many films would follow the same line such as the Terminator series where the intelligent machines would battle it out with humans for a world of ashes. Or the Matrix series where humanity was but a pawn in an elaborate system of metafictional world making for the machines who needed them like vampires sucking the electrical currents from our living dream. But now we are in the midst of such a world where the great narratives and culture industries that have built the artificial palaces of our multifarious cultures across the globe are coming apart at the seams. In the process of this the great backlash of the old guard, the conservative wing of the human equation seeks to reestablish the old order of things with every last ounce of its wagging power in the face of a planetary crisis such as the world has never seen.

Even as Marx predicated in such an early work as the *Grundrisse* humans are not important to Capital, they are but means to an end: the automation of the world. Humans are replaceable and non-essential to Capital. Always have been. As Marx would say,

In no way does the machine appear as the individual worker's means of labour. Its distinguishing characteristic is not in the least, as with the means of labour, to transmit the worker's activity to the object; this activity, rather, is posited in such a way that it merely transmits the machine's work, the machine's action, on to the raw material — supervises it and *guards against interruptions*. Not as with the instrument, which the worker animates and makes into his organ with his skill and strength, and whose handling therefore depends on his virtuosity. *Rather, it is the machine which possesses skill and strength in place of the worker, is itself the virtuoso, with a soul of its own in the mechanical laws acting through it;* and it consumes coal, oil etc. (*matières instrumentales*), just as the worker consumes food, to keep up its perpetual motion. The worker's activity, reduced to a mere abstraction of activity, is determined and regulated on all sides by the movement of the machinery, and not the opposite. The

science which compels the inanimate limbs of the machinery, by their construction, to act purposefully, as an automaton, does not exist in the worker's consciousness, but rather acts upon him through the machine as an alien power, as the power of the machine itself. (Grundrisse, p. 621) [My Italics]

It's in this passage that we see a supple transition from the organic (human) craftiness and art (technics) to that of the artificial (machinic) intelligence with its own laws and energy needs ( humans needing food, while the machine needs other planetary anorganic resources). This sense that the human worker is within this process and transition a mere appendage and necessary part of the ongoing processuality of this automatization, and that the human is no longer the master in his own house but rather the one controlled by those very machinic processes. This great reversal between organic and inorganic in our time, with the rise of machinic civilization and its artificial autonomization and independence from the human is for Stiegler the displacement of entropy and negentropy in the new dispensation of machinic civilization,

In the Anthropocene epoch, from which it is a matter of escaping as quickly as possible, the questions of life and negentropy arising with Darwin and Schrödinger must be redefined from the organological perspective defended here, according to which: (1) natural selection makes way for artificial selection; and (2) the passage from the organic to the organological displaces the play of entropy and negentropy. (AS, KL 659)

## BERNARD STIEGLER: AUTOMATIC SOCIETY

The next Industrial Revolution, a third one, eh? In a way, I guess the third one's been going on for some time, if you mean thinking machines. That would be the third revolution, I guess—machines that devalue human thinking.

—Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*

Like many professional scholars Bernard Stiegler's *gaze* has been turned toward the culture industries that have shaped our global era. Seeking in ancient Greek thought he's transposed many of that cultures conceptuality into a set of tools to expose some of the darker corners of our era's pathologies. Like many others he sees this replacement of humanity by the machinic powers of an automated society as a two-horned prodigy. On the one hand the predictions of such luminaries as Norbert Weiner, John Maynard Keynes, Karl Marx and so many others predicted a coming time when there would be an end of wage labour. But with the end of work the true challenge for Stiegler facing humanity is what to do with all those out of work and surplus humans? As he says it:

...the time liberated by the end of work must be put at the service of an automated culture, but one capable of producing new value and of reinventing work. Such a culture of dis-automatization, made possible by automatization, is what can and must produce negentropic value – and this in turn requires what I have previously referred to as the *otium* of the people.<sup>1</sup>

Let's chew on this for a few minutes. Stiegler accepts the fact that automation and the replacement of millions of workers in various aspects of our present global capitalist system is inevitable, but that we must discover against the Consumerist Culture that has driven our global society for a hundred years a new culture. The Culture of Disautomatization. One that produces negentropic value based on what he termed at one point the "otium of the people".

Now the concept and phrase "negative entropy" was introduced by Erwin Schrödinger in his 1944 popular-science book *What is Life?* Later, Léon Brillouin shortened the phrase to negentropy, to express it in a more "positive" way: a living system imports negentropy and stores. In the *Decadence of Industrial Democracies* Stiegler will describe otium this way:

Otium is that which constitutes the practice of retentional systems through which collective secondary retentions are elaborated, selected and transmitted, 20 and through which, in turn, protentions are formed. The formation of these protentions always puts into play the singularity of the one who is taking aim with these protentions, since this process is always equally informed by the singularity of their secondary retentions, which are precisely not collective. (DID, p. 61)

Of course **Otium**, a Latin abstract term, has a variety of meanings, including leisure time in which a person can enjoy eating, playing, resting, contemplation and academic endeavors. It sometimes, but not always, relates to a time in a person's retirement after previous service to the public or private sector, opposing "active public life". *Otium* can be a temporary time of leisure, that is sporadic. It can have intellectual, virtuous or immoral implications. It originally had the idea of withdrawing from one's daily business (*negotium*) or affairs to engage in activities that were considered to be artistically valuable or enlightening (i.e. speaking, writing, philosophy). It had particular meaning to businessmen, diplomats, philosophers and poets.<sup>2</sup>

For Stiegler we are losing our cultural memory and inheritance, and in the process the otium of the people that has guided and shaped its mind and body for hundreds if not thousands of years. We are living in that in-between-time of transition from one age to another, an unscripted and for the most part a topsy-turvy time of apocalyptic and chaotic struggles between various world cultures and otiums that are now failing their people due to the total completion of nihilism in our moment. The mis-trust and of culture, of books, of the elites, of the past is now at a high point. The young no longer bred on the world of either the religious or secular inheritance of cultural memory are living through a temporal vacuum. The Age of the Book is over. An age when the young were educated and instructed in the cultural inheritance of our multifarious past works of religious and secular arts and philosophies. Rather ours is a digital age of sound bytes and fragments that can no longer sustain the reading habits and solitary

practices of the Book. As Stiegler confesses,

...no society has ever existed that did not contain practices comparable to what the Roman nobility called otium. No such society exists. ?Xcept in the West of the industrial democracies which, taking themselves for post-industrial societies, are submitted to the 'leisure' industries, industries that are in fact the very negation of leisure, that is, of otium as practice, since these industries are constituted through the hegemony of imperatives arising from negotium. Such is their decadence. (DID, p. 62)

The slow erosion of language in the course of a hundred years at the hands of scholars who would end in the post-structuralist black hole and aporia of meaning has left us in a world where words and things no longer touch, a world depleted of meaning is no world at all, an empty world full of forces and nightmares. A world in which mass-media systems produce reality for us, guide and shape our opinions. As Henry A. Giroux remarks,

With meaning utterly privatized, words are reduced to signifiers that mimic spectacles of violence, designed to provide entertainment rather than thoughtful analysis. Sentiments circulating in the dominant culture parade either idiocy or a survival-of-the-fittest ethic, while anti-public rhetoric strips society of the knowledge and values necessary for the development of a democratically engaged and socially responsible public.<sup>3</sup>

Many pundits and scientists dub ours the Anthropocene Age in which humans become conscious of their role in the destruction and ruination of the earth. The Anthropocene era is that of industrial capitalism, an era in which calculation prevails over every other criteria of decision-making, and where algorithmic and mechanical becoming is concretized and materialized as logical automation and automatism, thereby constituting the advent of nihilism, as computational society becomes a society that is automated and remotely controlled. (Stiegler)

At the very moment that humanity becomes conscious of itself is the moment that it loses its memory, falls away into fragmented systems of control that squander both the mental and physical resources of the planet and replace them with the algorithmic culture of machinic intelligence. For Stiegler this is the moment of Nietzsche's *transvaluation of all values*,

We must think the Anthropocene with Nietzsche, as the geological era that consists in the devaluation of all values: it is in the Anthropocene, and as its vital issue, that the task of all noetic knowledge becomes the transvaluation of values. And this occurs at the moment when the noetic soul is confronted, through its own, organological putting-itself-in-question, with the completion of nihilism, which amounts to the very ordeal of our age – in an Anthropocene concretized as the age of planetarizing capitalism. (AS, KL 548)

In a world where culture is in disarray, the people mistrust both leadership and the mediatainment systems of cultural production we have entered that phase where nothing is true, everything is possible. So that for Stiegler a return to Marx and Nietzsche is imperative. Reading Marx and Nietzsche together in the service of a new critique of political economy, where the economy has become a cosmic factor on a local scale (a dimension of the cosmos) and therefore an ecology, must lead to a process of transvaluation, such that both economic values and those moral devaluations that result when nihilism is set loose as consumerism are 'transvaluated' by a new value of all values, that is, by negentropy – or negative entropy, or anti-entropy. (AS, KL 557)

The point of negentropy is to fight against the dissolution into total eclipse, to martial the unconscious energies on tap in the geospherical psyche of collective humankind, to bring about a resurgence in creative and empowered transformation against the forces that are taking us into a dark moment of death driven psychopathic madness.

All fine and dandy, but how? How enact such a scheme? Another pipe-dream from a scholar's arsenal of wishful ideas? Or does Stiegler have something up his sleeve? I'll return to this in the next post...

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1. Stiegler, Bernard. Automatic Society: The Future of Work (Kindle Locations 485-490). Wiley. Kindle Edition.
  2. Otium, Wikipedia.
  3. Giroux, Henry A.. Neoliberalism's War on Higher Education (p. 6). Haymarket Books. Kindle Edition.
  4. taken from here

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